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ABSTRACT

As part of an effort by the project group "Preparedness for Peace", this publication presents a conversation with Dr. Valentina Mitina of the Research Institute of General Pedagogy, USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences. Dr. Mitina, a senior researcher specializing in comparative education, is also an activist in nongovernmental organizations. Mitina offers her definition and views of peace education and explains what role the Soviet Union can play in the field. She explores the terms "disarmament education" and "education for international understanding" and the difficulties of introducing peace studies into a curriculum. The document includes notes about Mitina and presents an appendix that describes the Soviet committee of the movement "Educators for Peace and Mutual Understanding." (SG)

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EDUCATION FOR PEACE AND MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING: A PERSPECTIVE FROM THE SOVIET UNION

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Valentina Mitina
and
The Project "Preparedness for Peace"

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EDUCATION FOR PEACE AND MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING: A PERSPECTIVE FROM THE SOVIET UNION

Valentina Mitina
and
The Project "Preparedness for Peace"

Mitina, V. & The Project "Preparedness for Peace". Education for peace and mutual understanding: A perspective from the Soviet Union. Reprints and Miniprints (Malmö, Sweden: School of Education), No. 689, 1990.

The project group "Preparedness for Peace" at the Malmö School of Education in Sweden studies ways of helping children and young people to deal constructively with questions of peace and war. As part of this work, experts with special interest and competence in areas related to peace education are interviewed.

This publication presents such a conversation with Dr. Valentina Mitina, working at the Research Institute of General Pedagogy, USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences. Besides being a senior researcher, specializing in comparative education, Dr. Mitina is an activist in some non-governmental organizations. She is on the board of the Soviet movement "Educators for Peace and Mutual Understanding". - Interviewer: Åke Bjerstedt.

Keywords: Comparative education, conflict resolution, disarmament, environmental education, foreign languages, global approach, international education, interview, multi-cultural education, peace education, social responsibility, teacher education, the Soviet Union.

PEACE EDUCATION: A CONVERSATION WITH DR. VALENTINA MITINA, THE USSR

1.

AB: As an introduction, could you say a few words about yourself and your interest in the field of "peace education"?

VM: I am a researcher, working in the field of comparative education, and one of the aspects of comparative education, as I see it, is peace education. I have been interested in the problem for more than 20 years. I have been teaching in elementary and secondary schools and have been involved in activities related to international education. In my school, we organized an international club, a club for international friendship, and the activities of the class were very wide and the students were very interested in this. Even now that these students are grown-up people, they still remember these old activities. So that was how I got started.

AB: I know that you are involved now in a project related to Eva Nordland's work. Could you say a few words about that?

VM: Our project was started in February 1988, and the idea was to make a research study - independent and parallel research - on the theme of responsibility, care and other aspects of peace education. Later on, environmental education was also included.

Perhaps you have read the book "Breakthrough". We would like to do something similar. We hope to bring together ideas from American, Soviet and Norwegian people, illustrating approaches to such things as human rights, ecological education, social responsibility, cooperative education and how to work with these themes at different levels of the school. There will be a collection of papers as a result of our cooperative work.

2.

AB: What do you think of first when you hear the words "peace education"?

VM: Earlier we didn't use the term "peace education", but we talked about "international education", and although the meaning is different, it is related in some respects. Later on we began to use the expression "peace education". Thinking about the essence of the activity, I got accustomed to that many, many years ago when I started my work at school. Later on we had to coordinate the ideas of international education we had at our school with some of the ideas that were not present in our work in international education, but which are now seen as part of peace education.

AB: Is the term "peace education" or the translation of it used in your country widely?

VM: Yes, it is. We are developing a theoretical base for peace education.

3.

AB: If you think back on your own school days, were there some aspects in your schooling that might be considered an attempt at "peace education"?

VM: It was long ago. I finished schooling the year the Second World War ended. So, of course, at that time peace education wasn't used, I'm afraid. We needed peace, but we were surrounded by war. So that was a special time.

4.

AB: Do you believe that schools in your country, as you know them today, contribute to a "peace education"?

VM: I do, at least in some ways. Some of them may be contributing in a more active way, while others are not so very active. In every school we have those clubs for international friendship. They may not always be so active, but they exist anyhow. We also have a lesson of peace on the very first day of every school year. That often means that the children are preparing for the

lesson, and they are trying to say what they have done during the previous year for peace. It may be done in different ways - it depends upon the school.

AB: How long has that lesson of peace existed in your country?

VM: For about six years.

AB: And these initial peace lessons are carried out all over the country?

VM: Yes.

5.

AB: Do you think it is at all possible for schools to contribute to a "peace education"? If so, what are some of the steps and measures to be taken that you think of first?

VM: Yes, I think it is possible. But, of course, I think that there are a lot of things that can be done to help the teachers and the students to make it more effective. Sometimes it is a little bit formalized. It is not always very penetrating. As far as our schools are concerned, we have usually oriented this work towards the world outside our country. But I think that peace education should also deal with our internal problems and with peace in our homes. So we have to reorient this kind of education a little bit. To my mind we should also develop such things as teaching the teachers how to teach the students to overcome stereotypes and to develop their critical thinking and such skills as care, responsibility, conflict resolution and others that are necessary for a broad education for peace.

6.

AB: What would be some of the possible differences in peace education approaches among younger and older students in schools?

VM: The students are very different in the first and second grades and the upper high school. The younger pupils are simply not able to understand parts of the relevant

content. Not only the content but also the methods should be adapted to the capability of their age level.

One aspect of peace education that should be developed early is the multi-cultural approach. Most of our communities are multi-national communities. First of all the children have to know about their own traditions. They have to know about their own peculiarities. And then they have to know that there are other people living next to them who are similar to them in many respects, but who have their own traditions and peculiarities. This could be dealt with in the kindergarten and in the elementary school, maybe using songs and dolls in different costumes as the starting-point for a discussion.

7.

AB: If you were an upper-secondary school teacher in a subject with which you are particularly familiar, how would you like to make the students more conscious of and more prepared for problems of peace, within that subject?

VM: I have been a teacher of English. Using a lot of texts and additional materials, I have to show our students how English people live and how American people live. I try to show that they are different from us in some respects, but at the same time they have the same needs. While preparing myself, I try to find the kind of material that can make my students understand these things and develop their attitudes towards foreign people. Sometimes we still have stereotypes that have to be analyzed for the sake of overcoming them.

8.

AB: In international debates, the terms "disarmament education" and "peace education" have been used, in addition to some other related terms ("global education", "education for international understanding" etc.). Do you have any comments and preferences as to this terminology?

VM: To my mind "disarmament education" is a part of peace education or global education - one of the important

parts. "Education for international understanding" is also a part of peace education or global education. First I preferred the term "international education", but now I think that "global education" is better. Many of the problems that we have are really global.

9.

AB: In many countries, questions related to disarmament and peace are highly controversial. Would you anticipate any difficulties, for example with parents or other members of the community, when introducing peace education in schools? If so, what kind of difficulties? Do you see any way out of such problems?

VM: About three years ago, we had some difficulties especially in disarmament education. But with the new changes in our society - for example, we are cutting down the military budget - it is becoming easier. Using the term "international education" has not been difficult in our country, but when we try to make comparative research and speak about the same things with people outside our country, it has sometimes been difficult.

If we meet difficulties with parents, we have to discuss with them, showing them that we really need disarmament education because of the changes in society. Of course, there are still parents or students who have other opinions, and we should be prepared for pluralistic views.

10.

AB: What needs to be done in teacher training in order to prepare future teachers more adequately for the area of "peace education"?

VM: I think we have some problems in preparing new teachers at the teacher-training institutes. While they are taught about the subjects they are going to teach - let's say physics, chemistry etc. - they have special parts of the courses that deal with disarmament and peace education, but this instruction is comparatively short. We need to extend it, perhaps even have a special

course on peace education or global education, which they have in some institutes.

About a year and a half ago we started the Soviet movement "Educators for Peace and Mutual Understanding" (see Appendix). I am on the board of that, my responsibility being international cooperation among teachers. Through this organization, we are now trying to prepare special courses for teacher training.

AB: Is this a large group of teachers?

VM: It's a movement, it's not a group. In every region of the Soviet Union, we have people who accept our goals and means, and so they are becoming more active in this. Some of them were active earlier, but simply were not enough informed, well-oriented or cooperative. Now we try to find the most urgent problems that we have to solve together. One of these problems is how to help teacher-training institutes with peace education.

11.

AB: In many schools, the students represent a variety of nationalities and cultural backgrounds. To what extent would it be possible to use this fact as an aid in education for peace? Would you expect some difficulties in doing so?

VM: In our country we have about 150 nationalities and ethnic groups, and in many communities you find three or four, or even ten or eleven, representatives of different nationalities. For many years we thought that this was really a good thing for international education, because our students would have different groups, not far away but close to them, and this fact was used for the sake of international education. But then we found out that not everything was working well. Why? One of the reasons was that we have a centralized system of education where the teachers had the same goals and the same methods, and they did not take the peculiarities of the different areas into

consideration. We have problems with our national subgroups, problems of a psychological, economic and social character. As educators we still have not done what we can to help resolve these problems.

12.

AB: Sometimes the term "global survival" is used to refer to an area dealing both with the risks of nuclear war and with the risks of far-reaching environmental damage through pollution and the overuse of resources. How do you look upon dealing with these two categories of risks together in school? Do you have any suggestions as to how the teacher could approach the problem area of environmental damage?

VM: It is a very complicated problem - we often speak about threats to the environment. I think the first thing to do is to raise the general cultural level, because they may know the risks of this or that, but they are not culturally prepared for it, so it becomes just superficial knowledge, but no clear attitude.

We are speaking about the risks of nuclear war and all the damages related to it, but at the same time we have the trouble of Chernobyl. This is also a kind of war - a war against our neglect and irresponsibility. It was also like a small war for our country, because in practice we lost a territory and had severe damage to the people. So I think these things have to be included in our education. We need to fight our irresponsibility, for example, in the nuclear field.

13.

AB: Is there anything else that you would like to add about the school and peace education?

VM: The increasing cooperation among educators from different countries at international levels is important. I think that it is a good thing that we are working together, that we will see that we have problems in common and discuss how to overcome them.

Many of our problems are now global, and exchange programs between schools help us to understand these problems and make us better prepared to work with them.

NOTES ON THE INTERVIEWEE

Valentina Mitina. Address: Research Institute of General Pedagogy, Pavla Korchagina Street, House N7, 1292, Moscow, USSR.

After graduation from the Pedagogical Institute Dr. Mitina has been teaching English for 20 years (all levels of education). Since 1971 she has been a senior researcher, specializing in comparative education. Now she is working at the Research Institute of General Pedagogy, USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences. She is the author of more than 50 works on comparative education, peace education etc. Dr. Mitina is an activist in some non-government organizations. She is on the board of the Soviet movement "Educators for Peace and Mutual Understanding".

SOVIET COMMITTEE OF THE MOVEMENT "EDUCATORS FOR PEACE AND MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING"

Secretariat:
42, Lenin Ave., Gate I, Room 1255a
Moscow, USSR
Tel: 930-84-86

I. GOALS OF THE MOVEMENT:

a. To shape new political thinking;
b. To promote social and political activity of the teaching community for the good of peace and mutual understanding;
c. To improve the education of the rising generation for peace and international cooperation.

II. THE TASKS OF THE MOVEMENT:

a. To intensify a scientific interpretation by the teaching community of the challenges facing the present-day world, of the new philosophy of international relations, and of the comprehensive system of international security;
b. To promote the pooling and coordination of the efforts by Soviet mass organizations in the education of children and young people for peace;
c. To encourage the summing up and spreading of advanced experience, new ideas and initiatives in education for peace;
d. To promote the specialized training of educators of all forms, types, and levels of education for educational work in this direction;
e. To encourage the many-sided activity of all types of educational establishments for bringing up the pupils and students in the spirit of peace, internationalism, and patriotism;
f. To promote scientific research, elaboration of methods and method manuals for those practically involved in education for peace process;

g. To arrange actions by the teaching community for peace, international security and disarmament, and provide all-round support to the peace-oriented activity of Soviet public organizations at national and international levels;

h. To participate in the international activity of the teaching community with an eye to strengthening international understanding and peace and education for peace;

i. To establish and promote ties with international organizations, scientific institutions, and specialists from different countries with a view to elaborating the theory and practice of education for peace, preparing appropriate publications, teaching aids and material, and disseminating this material;

j. To envigorate bilateral and multilateral ties with national teachers' movements for peace, in particular with the aim of founding an international movement of teachers for peace;

k. The movements' objective is also to spread the ideas and promote the implementation of the Recommendations concerning education for international un'erstanding, cooperation and peace, and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms adopted by the UNESCO General Conference at its 18th Session in 1974, as well as the Recommendations of the Intergovernmental Conference on education for international understanding, cooperation and peace, and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms for the purpose of moulding public opinion to promote security and disarmament, held in Paris in 1983.

III. PROGRAMS OF ACTIVITY:

1. Selection, preparation, publicizing and dissemination of material on the new political thinking, general security, education for peace for subsequent independent work, and for the teacher-

training and retraining systems. Organization of the elaboration of curricula and method manuals for these systems.

2. Involvement of the teaching community in vigorous activity for peace.
3. Planning and elaboration of joint actions for peace and peace education together with other public forces and movements, in particular, with the mass media.
4. Working out new forms and methods of education for peace and supporting such tested ones as Peace Lessons, Peace Museums, and the "Children Build Peace Together" movement, among others.
5. Elaboration of proposals for the improvement of education for peace and international understanding at educational and extracurricular institutions of all types, and proposals relating to a revision of textbooks and teaching aids for the same purposes.
6. Establishment of close ties with UNESCO, UNICEF, and other governmental and non-governmental international organizations with a view to fostering education for peace, drafting bulletins, proposals, recommendations, documents for international meetings of specialists, congresses and conferences, and participation in such events.
7. Support for the international movement of teachers for peace, and assistance in the founding of an international organization, Teachers for Peace.

The basis of the movement is formed by voluntary public groups which are established at educational and extracurricular institutions of all types and levels; at the request of members of these groups they can be established at a definite educational institution of a township, city, or administrative district regardless of the departmental subordination of the educators affiliated to the group.

The groups establish ties between themselves and also with the Soviet committee of the movement for the purpose of information and coordination of their

activities (any accountability is ruled out). In the event of a considerable growth of the number of groups and participants in the movement, city and regional public committees of the movement could be set up.

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